

Skunk Farmer Hopes To Get Stinking Rich

By Jim Parsons

Ray Hanson, Chetek, Wis., is a dairy farmer — of sorts. He milks skunks.

Unfortunately for his wife and children, he doesn't milk the skunks very well. That's because Hanson hasn't found a way to milk a skunk without getting contaminated with one of the most offensive odors known to man.

After milking he has to take his clothes off outside and leave them outside, says Marjorie Hanson, who is not entirely enamored at having a skunk farmer for a husband. Or with having two barns full of 80 skunks.

And just why does Ray Hanson milk skunks and put up with the odious consequences?

Because potentially there's a lot of money in skunks. Or more specifically, in skunk "essence." (People in the business call it essence; others call it odor or skunk stink).

Hanson and his business partners have just come out with a product — skunk essence in a plastic-covered vial — that they hope millions of women will buy for \$15 and pin on their shirts and blouses.

It's called Skunk Guard and is the latest thing in rape prevention.

But, even if the product doesn't become a big seller, the 42-year-old skunk farmer will keep looking for a successful way to milk skunks.

That's because the essence also is in demand among deer hunters. They use it to mask their scent from the deer.

For several years Hanson has been putting out such a product. A small amount sprayed or poured on twigs and leaves downwind from the hunter will fool the deer, but the essence is so diluted that the odor doesn't permeate the hunter's clothes.

Until he can perfect his milking technique, Hanson will continue to get most of his essence from trappers, who kill the skunks and then use a syringe to extract the fluid from a gland that is just under the skin. A mature skunk only has about an ounce of the fluid, which is why it is in short supply.

Hanson's experience as a trapper got him into the skunk business about 15 years ago.

"I was always catching skunks in my traps. The pelts were worth 5 or 6 dollars back then, and the essence was worth 3 or 4 dollars, but the problem was how to keep the skunk from spraying when you killed it." (Wisconsin law states that skunks and most other animals must be killed before being removed from a trap).

Skunks would spray automatically no matter how quickly they were killed, so Hanson invented his first product for hunters. He put a syringe-like needle on a 5-foot stick.

The trapper can use that to poison the skunk without bothering it enough to trigger the spray.

Hanson slowly developed a business around his skunk-related activities.

Then Dr. Jack Scaff of Hawaii entered the picture. He's a cardiologist and, along with his wife, an avid runner. One day Donna Scaff had a scare when four young men pulled up beside her and indicated that they were going to pull her into their car. They were frightened off by another runner, but the incident was upsetting.

Shortly after that, the doctor read an article suggesting that Hanson's skunk spray could be used as a defense against molesters, and contacted him.

After some experimenting they found the proper dosage that simu-

Ag World

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If you've read or heard a good Ag World type story you'd like to share with others, send it to: FARM SHOW, Box 1029, Lakeville, Minn. 55044.



Photo courtesy Minneapolis Star & Tribune

Ray Hanson uses skunk "essence" to make Skunk Guard, the latest new weapon in rape prevention.

lates an encounter with a skunk. Some mineral oil was added to make sure the liquid would adhere to the woman's clothing and drive the attacker off. Hanson also believes that the essence would mark the attacker and help in his identification.

Scaff and three friends have formed a partnership with Hanson, and are advertising the product in Hawaii in a few small publications and displaying it at sports and health shows. So far only a few dozen women have

tried the product.

Of course, if sales boom, he is going to have to come up with a lot of essence. And that gets back to the milking proposition. None of Hanson's ideas for milking tranquilized skunks has worked. "A drop or two always leaks out," he said, "but that's enough to do you in. I think that in about six months I'll have a way of getting the fluid from the skunk to the bottle without any getting out. If I can do that, what I'd really like to do is

sell that knowledge, that technique, to others who would raise skunks and milk them. Maybe it would be like a franchise and I'd be the McDonald's of the skunk business.

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